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ABSTRACT

The Florida A&M/Florida State University alternative teacher education program, known as the Panhandle Center for Alternate Teacher Education (PCATE), is one of six university-school district partnerships established by Florida statute to provide alternative teacher education. The alternative nature of the program is found in its delivery system, its target audience, the training design, and the length of training rather than in program content. The program makes it possible for content-degreed individuals who possess temporary teacher certification to acquire full professional teaching licensure through an on-the-job training program. Participants can complete the professional education course requirements needed to be certified as secondary teachers in 15 to 18 months. According to preliminary findings from a survey of teachers who completed the PCATE program, who took the core foundations and methods courses on an inservice basis and Florida State University traditional teacher education graduates, who took the same courses as part of their preservice preparation, the PCATE teachers found their courses to be related to their teaching to a greater degree than did the traditional program graduates. (IAH)

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In Search of Alternatives in Teacher Education: A Paper Presented at the 12th Annual International Seminar on Teacher Education, Armidale, Australia

by
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An alternate route to professional teacher education in Florida was made possible by 1988 legislation providing that universities and colleges collaborate with school districts to develop a program of study for content-degreed individuals who are employed as teachers to become fully certified professional teachers. A temporary teaching certificate, with a validity period of two years, enables content-degreed persons to situate themselves in a work-as-you-earn or on-the-job training program to acquire full professional teaching licensure in Florida.

The Florida A&M/Florida State University alternate teacher education program in collaboration with 15 school districts is one of six existing university-school district partnerships established under Florida statute which provides for alternate teacher education. The Florida A&M/Florida State University program is known as the Panhandle Center for Alternate Teacher Education (PCATE) and has been in operation for over three years. PCATE is situated as part of both universities' Colleges of Education and is housed in the Florida State University Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning. PCATE's coordinator works in tandem with school district personnel and the Florida Department of Education, identifying and monitoring the progress of participants through the program.

Alternate Teacher Education

Some see alternate teacher preparation as a solution to the teacher shortage

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because it provides a pipeline for individuals to enter the profession without forfeiting a viable income while returning to the university for two years of traditional teacher education. Others identify the alternate route as a way for talented, highly motivated, altruistic individuals to recruit themselves into the teaching profession (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Mangan, 1990; Viadero, 1990).

The alternate teacher preparation program, which allows teachers to become practitioners in a learn-as-you-earn setting, has drawn criticism from teacher educators. Citing the exploding knowledge base for teaching, critics find it ironic that people are being allowed into the classroom with little or no preservice pedagogical training (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). Darling-Hammond (1990) has asserted that graduates of the traditional route are not untrained novices as are the completers of alternate teacher education who have not satisfied the prerequisite for public trust. Proponents of alternate teacher preparation claim that the alternately prepared teacher makes up for lack of pedagogical training with an abundance of enthusiasm (Mangan, 1990; Viadero, 1990).

Of all that we in the PCATE program have learned about alternate preparation of teachers, the most informative piece is best expressed by a participant:

> I like teaching and working with young people. God has blessed me more than I ever dreamed. Even without all the fancy equipment, I do a good job, but it would be easier with it. I guess it is better to have a motivated teacher with only a piece of chalk than an unmotivated teacher with everything. One of the greatest assets of [the PCATE] program was the opportunity to discuss teaching problems with other beginning teachers and not feel threatened. In the school system, it is hard to talk with older teachers. The teachers with the most experience act like they are holding on to a secret.

> PCATE gave me the chance to talk about teaching with teachers who were in the same boat as me and who had my problems not their own secrets.

This was offered by a man who came into teaching from a career in medical technology with a degree in agriculture and who was teaching middle grades science in a rural Florida school district. Other participants in the program concur: "PCATE let me expose my fears and weaknesses to other teachers in a non-threatening environment;" "the PCATE program provided me with valuable training and experiences;" and, "the support provided by the group made my first year easier. I am a very happy home economics teacher. This is partially a result of my work with PCATE and the practical day-to-day information provided about teaching." Participants in the program continually report that regular weekend instruction and sharing sessions enable them to be more reflective practitioners.

We believe that the network of these beginning teachers from several different districts fostered by PCATE has successfully answered Millman and Darling-Hammond's (1991) call for assistance for beginning teachers with their socialization skills. Lortie (1975) called most teacher induction "the Robinson Crusoe approach" where isolation is a crucial problem for beginners. The PCATE program has provided orientation to the profession while also giving beginning teachers the opportunity to spend time with other newcomers. The program has fostered what Evertson (1991) has called "a sociocultural understanding of the norms, rules, and expectations of the organization" (p. 99) in a nurturing environment with beginning teachers, university professors, and district personnel.

The PCATE Program

Now in its third year of operation, the PCATE program collaborates with fifteen North Florida school districts and offers teacher preparation for first-year secondary

teachers who are employed and endorsed by their districts. When they enter the program, participants hold baccalaureate degrees in teachable majors, possess a Florida Temporary Teaching Certificate, must successfully complete PCATE coursework and the Florida Professional Orientation Program (a one-year teacher competency assessment), and must pass the Florida Teacher Certification Exam [FTCE].

The PCATE curriculum is driven by a combination of the teacher education established core curriculum and the 27 generic teaching competencies identified by the Florida Performance Measurement System. Development of the PCATE curriculum has been informed by Goodlad's *A Place Called School* (1984), the Carnegie Forum report (1986), the Holmes Group's treatise (1986) and other studies which call for greater professionalization in teaching and programs which include better strategies for melding theory and practice in the preparation of teachers.

Through the PCATE program, participants can complete professional education course requirements in 15 to 18 months while also completing the first year of teaching. The program has a flexible entry policy which makes entry into the program possible whenever a school district hires and/or identifies the participant. The professional education coursework includes:

	Sem. Hrs./Equivalent
Sociological/Philosophical Foundations of Education	3
Psychological Foundations of Education	3
General Methods of Teaching	6
Teaching Reading in the Content Area	3
Special Methods of Teaching in the Content Area	3 - 9
Teaching Practicum	12

The instructional delivery occurs in weekend seminars or as directed individual study; thus, what is *alternate* about our program is the delivery system not the content nor quality. Additionally, university supervisors regularly visit in participants' classes,

providing clinical observation and feedback. As part of the Teaching Practicum, participants are provided seminars: Classroom Survival Skills, Teaching the Minority Students, Making It 'Til Friday, Classroom Clout, Lesson Planning, Teaching Strategies, Cooperative Learning Strategies, Assertive Discipline, Stress Management, Computers in the Classroom, and Identifying Student Needs and Deficiencies. These seminars are added as instructional units as a result of a survey of the needs of the group: when it became apparent that the majority of the participants had no idea what cooperative learning is or how to use it in their classrooms, PCATE hired a district resource specialist to provide the seminar in Cooperative Learning Strategies. We agree with Haberman (1992), alternate teacher education is "driven by practitioner know-how and by need in the school district" (p. 4). And, like Haberman, we see this as a strength because it makes teacher education responsive to what is happening in the classroom.

As a field-based teacher education program, PCATE addresses the needs of the beginning teacher through the seminars in the Teaching Practicum, while it maintains the integrity of the core curriculum of traditional teacher education. Sociological Foundations of Education, Educational Psychology, two general methods courses, Teaching Reading in the Content Area, and at least one subject area methods course satisfy the Florida Department of Education's requirements for professional education coursework and represent the bulk of the coursework commonly required of all teacher education majors. The same professors who teach these courses in our traditional teacher education program also teach the courses for PCATE.

Perceptions of Graduates and Completers

Preliminary results of a survey asking Florida State University teacher education graduates and PCATE completers to assess the effectiveness of the core curriculum as it

relates to their teaching show an interesting difference. 57% of the traditional teacher education graduates who responded indicate that sociological and psychological foundations courses were not very helpful. 64% of the alternate teacher education completers thought the sociological foundations course was helpful; and, 72% indicated that the psychological foundations course was very helpful.

Ninety percent of the alternate teacher education completers indicated that methods courses were very helpful or helpful in preparing them for teaching; whereas, only 57% of the traditional graduates thought the methods courses were helpful.

Seventy-three percent of the alternate teacher education completers indicated that their associate teaching experiences were helpful; whereas, only 57% of the traditional graduates thought the associate teaching was helpful.

Again, this is only preliminary data which will be reported as part of a much larger study comparing these two cohorts of beginning teachers. However, this information provides some tentative confirmation of what I have believed all along: preservice teachers in foundations and methods courses have only a vague frame of reference for the information they are expected to absorb; but, inservice teachers in those same courses have a very real frame of reference and absorb that information to use fearlessly in first period Monday morning. Berliner (1990) has called teaching a contextualized bag-of-tricks. I would add that newcomers to the profession do not really have a bag to put tricks in until they have a classroom for which they are responsible.

The PCATE completers who report such helpfulness from our program's curriculum would leave their Saturday class in psychological foundations and try what had been discussed in their own weekday high school classrooms. When they reported to class the next Saturday, they were eager to share what had happened. I am reminded of

one former dental hygienist who disrupted a discussion of discipline and what constitutes a desist with, "So that's what I was doing when I stood over Tommy and glared at him until he stopped talking?" A former chiropractor now teaching honors math replied, "No, what you were using was the MDA, the Momma Death Stare."

There is an easy rapport to be found among people who share common ground. One common vista we have found in the PCATE program is the success of beginning teachers talking with other beginners about their practice while in 'safe' seminar settings with teacher educators. In these sessions, newcomers share the reality of their own practice while they discuss the theory and pedagogical topics of the day's assignment. Additionally, as new participants enter the program, they find an established support group -- other beginning teachers, most from other school districts, from whom they quickly begin to receive an informal induction into the profession and the PCATE program. Comments by program participants shared in group session include:

-- Be sure you teach and review and, most of all, follow your discipline plan.

-- Ed psych is real good. Don't sell your book back. You'll need it to brush up before you take the professional education part of the FTCE. Probably 40% of the questions on that test come from your book.

-- My biggest problem is all the paperwork. They have a workshop in time and stress management that's helped me.

-- If there's another teacher you want to observe, they'll help you. They worked it out for me to spend a whole day with someone the kids say is the best teacher at my school.

Gant (1992) says this informal education of new teachers is the socialization process which empowers beginners with the skills to successfully negotiate their ways

through the organization. Moreover, the participants form a support group which effectively counters the sense of isolation experienced by new teachers.

An additional support mechanism provided by PCATE is the program coordinator and staff who can navigate the twin bureaucracies of the state Department of Education [DOE] and the university system. The coordinator is trained by the DOE to evaluate transcripts to determine eligibility for teacher certification. The DOE stands behind all eligibility determinations made by alternate teacher education coordinators trained by the department. Eligibility statements issued by the DOE, teacher certification rules and application forms and procedures can be intimidating and indecipherable for the novice. The coordinator, who understands educationese and has easy access to a certification officer, is an administrative mentor and trail guide through the certification process maze.

Another bureaucratic maze through which the PCATE coordinator serves as a trail guide is the university system. A strength of the PCATE program is that most of its coursework is processed through the continuing education arm of the university. Continuing Education addresses the needs of non-traditional students, i.e., students over the age of 25 who exhibit certain characteristics: they are college students in order to cope with changes in their lives; and they are in transition triggered by some event(s) in one or more facets of their lives (Aslanian & Brickell, 1988). PCATE participants are non-traditional students at Florida A&M/Florida State Universities; and, more importantly, they are coping with a career-change. The university registrar's office time schedules conflict with the PCATE participants' teaching duties and time schedules particularly if the participant teaches in a district that is 60+ miles from the university.

As with the DOE, PCATE participants have a liaison with the university in the program coordinator and staff. The coordinator and staff understand how the university

system works and have established contacts throughout. The program gets participants enrolled in the university and registered in courses which are offered under the auspices of an agreement between PCATE and Continuing Education. And, the program coordinator and staff facilitate the issuance of transcripts stamped with the requisite statement that the participant has completed an approved program in Alternate Teacher Education. The coordinator and staff routinely run check on participant status in the university as well as at the DOE through a computerized network and can act on problems like nonpayment of fees, health stops, or certification difficulties. This administrative support mechanism provided by PCATE means that the participant has a savvy guide through both bureaucracies, is not out there on his/her own unnecessarily stymied by systemic requirements, and is able to concentrate on learning to be a professional educator.

Conclusion

Alternate teacher education as conceived by Florida A&M/Florida State Universities is not a panacea of reform in teacher education. We are not so naive as to believe that our PCATE program is the model of teacher preparation for the future. However, we have been guided by the belief that the program offers a perspective on alternatives. In essence, we have taken the existing teacher education curriculum, put it in an alternate delivery system, combined it with teacher educator-directed seminars in best practice, provided university clinical observation and feedback, fostered support group networking among the participants, and insured an administrative liaison acting on behalf of the participants with the Florida Department of Education, the universities, and the school districts. We have responded to the recommendation of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE]: that the target audience, the training design, and the length of training be alternate, instead of alternate program content,

difficulty, or results (AACTE, 1985). The most significant discoveries we have made in the past three years of program operation are that providing an administrative support system for career-changers is critically essential; that providing for participant networking with other beginning teachers is one avenue for successful retention of participants through the difficult first years of teaching; and, that fostering a collaborative effort with involvement by the state department of education, the universities, the school districts, the alternate teacher education program, and the participant is crucial. Florida's alternate teacher education program informs the reform in teacher education simply by affirming that a sense of comradeship and sharing of endeavors does enhance the preparation of teaching professionals.

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